

## An Easy Yoke

Pr9 Yr A, Romans 7:15-25a, Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 July 5, 2020  
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I'm tired. I'm tired because this has been an exhausting spring. Getting through the Covid restrictions has been hard. Being cooped up together has not been easy. The chaos of the last few months has meant that everything that was simple has become complicated and often difficult. And its exhausting to live with anxiety and worry, uncertainty and confusion each and every day.

And I haven't even touched on the tragedies that happened this spring and the personal worries and concerns you and those in your family have had to carry. So I suspect that most of you are also tired. Perhaps not for the same reasons and maybe not even in the same ways. But all of us are tired, weary, and need rest.

Our gospel lesson is filled with rich images and meaning and each verse deserves a sermon of its own. But for this morning I'm going to focus in on the final verses where Jesus says "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Powerful, inviting words which say that when we are exhausted, drained, and struggling that we are meant to fall into the loving embrace of our God.

And I need to stay with that part of the reading for a moment. Because while it may seem straightforward that God offers us rest and renewal and none of us would argue with that, our difficulty comes when we are weary and burdened and start to wonder if the promise of rest is really for us. Because do you know what I hear most often from people who are hurting and who want to deepen their spirituality?

I hear a longing for peace and rest and God which is usually followed by "and when I get myself in a better place I'll be able to pray" or "When life finally quiets down I'll have time for God." And we know that's the wrong way to approach faith but the fact is that all of us carry that idea, that doubt if you will, that God only wants us if we are righteous, holy, and all put together and that Jesus only wants energetic, eager, and capable disciples. And nothing could be further from the truth.

That's why Paul in our epistle reading talks about how even he, an apostle, struggles to do the right thing and to be the person he knows Christ calls him to be. And after recounting how he fails, how he tries and does not have the strength or ability he ends by asking who will save me from myself? And answers his own

question by professing that only Jesus Christ can save.

The invitation in our gospel lesson is for those who are weary. Those of us who are worried, frustrated, and carrying a weight on our shoulders. Those of us who can't go another step, who fear the road ahead, who have given everything and have nothing left to give. And the invitation is also for those who aren't yet overwhelmed but who are growing tired. For those who are eager for a break, some relief, some renewal. And the promise is that Jesus can offer that to us.

I have some friends who got a new kitten. And on a video chat they were showing off the cat who played a bit for me to see and then settled into the arms of one of the people and was enjoying being scratched behind the ears. And in an instant the movement ceased, the purring stopped and the kitten was sound asleep. Safe and secure in arms that loved and treasured him

Jesus promises us rest. The opportunity to know we are safe and no longer need to toil or fear. And that promise of rest isn't just a few moments respite or a bit of time to simply catch our breath. No, the promise is for us to be embraced and held by the love of God so that we can let go and lest allow ourselves to truly rest. Without the problems of life making our minds race, without the worries weighing us down, without anything except the certainty that we are cherished and beloved surrounding us and letting us relax and be renewed. Relax so our bodies can recover and heal. Renewed so our minds can clear and quiet. Come, Jesus says and find rest. Come and be renewed, come and recover.

And I don't know about you but that sounds wonderful. An opportunity to set aside my tiredness and experience comfort and peace. A time where my burdens aren't on my shoulders and I can let go of what is holding my down and back. A possibility to move away from what has been happening to something made possible by God's love and grace.

And yet even as I speak about that rest there is a part of me wondering about how I am going to do all the things that I will have to do later. For there is work to be done, responsibilities to be upheld, burdens that I am going to have to carry in the future. And this is where the passage gets really interesting. Because the rest isn't promised so that we can have a time away and then simply return to what is happening in our lives. Certainly a pause would be welcome and good but the

promise is actually something much greater. The promise is that we will be renewed, restored, and also remade. So that we can truly live in faith.

For Jesus says "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Coming to Jesus and discovering the love which awaits us allows our lives to change. Because we don't have to face the worries, the stress, the uncertainty of what is happening in the world or to us by ourselves. We can rest. But more than that we can live in a new way with Jesus beside us.

For knowing that we don't walk the road of life alone gives us strength but that is not all that Jesus promises. Because "My yoke is easy" is a reminder that the way of faith, following Jesus means that God shares in the work and life and everything that lies ahead. Jesus lightens our load by sharing with us the grace and love and strength of God.

Faith doesn't burden us but releases us from the cares of this world as we realize that life is not about getting as many things done as possible or always being busy but about knowing and embracing our possibilities and potentials and putting our efforts into what is important. Faith isn't one more thing that we have to do but the way we do the things that need to be done in life.

Jesus walks with us and shares in our lives and along the way teaches us. For Jesus shows us what is important and unimportant, what needs to be done and what needs to be left undone. A Christian life is an invitation to learn and grow as people who make a difference in this world. People who work with each other with the Holy Spirit guiding us to discover what we can do and be through and by a life of faith.

For Jesus comes to show us the way to live as God's people. A way filled with life and opportunity. A way which isn't a burden but a freedom as we live as God intends us to live. A way which offers us a renewal for our souls, the very depths of who we are, in each and every step that we take with each other and with God.